

# What Charlie Chaplin's Wife Told

Mildred Harris's Surprising Story of Her Domestic Life with the Famous Film Comedian Which Won Her Recent Divorce—but Not a Word from Mr. Chaplin on His Side of It All



Charlie Chaplin in Gloomy Mood.



Mildred Harris Just Before She Married Mr. Chaplin.



Charlie.

It was an odd match when the news leaked out that Charlie Chaplin, funniest comedian in the motion picture world, had married Mildred Harris whose film specialty is tears, "sob stuff." And the news of the marriage was soon followed by whispers that the funny man bridegroom was not getting on very well with the tearful bride.

Nobody seemed to know just what was the matter but in due time Mrs. Chaplin admitted that she and her husband had separated. Then followed several statements from Mrs. Chaplin but no comments came from Mr. Chaplin.

At last the matrimonial troubles drifted into the Los Angeles courts. Mrs. Chaplin brought suit for divorce. And here on this page is the sworn testimony given by Mildred Harris Chaplin in support of her plea for a divorce. Mr. Chaplin did not take the trouble to appear at the trial and Charlie Chaplin's version of the matter is not on record.

When the case was called recently before Judge York Mrs. Chaplin took the witness stand in her own behalf. Her

lawyer, Mr. Gilbert, with his questions and her answers, developed this picture of the first real life matrimonial part ever played by the famous comedian.

**DIRECT EXAMINATION.**  
**QUESTION BY LAWYER GILBERT.**—State your name in full, please.

**ANSWER BY MRS. MILDRED HARRIS CHAPLIN.**—Mildred Harris Chaplin.

**QUESTION.**—How old are you, Mrs. Chaplin?

**ANSWER.**—Nineteen.

**Q.**—How long have you been living in California?

**A.**—Since I was seven years old.

**Q.**—When were you married?

**A.**—October 23, 1918.

**Q.**—When did you and Mr. Chaplin become separated, finally?

**A.**—A year ago this coming February.

**Q.**—Were there any children by this marriage?

**A.**—One boy.

**Q.**—Is it living or dead?

**A.**—Dead.

**Q.**—You say you were married when you were seventeen years of age?

**A.**—Yes.  
**Q.**—With whom had you lived prior to that time?

**A.**—My mother.

**Q.**—Did she keep you constantly under her care?

**A.**—She did.

**Q.**—What was the course of conduct which your mother pursued toward you insofar as caring for you and your education and matters of that kind?

**A.**—Mother had always sent me to school and I started in motion pictures when I was twelve years old and mother had a teacher for me.

**Q.**—What has been the general condition of your health ever since, whether you are strong physically or otherwise?

**A.**—I have always been quite healthy; I have never been terribly strong, and I have had a few spells of illness, but never very serious outside of scarlet fever. I was not very strong when I was married.

**Q.**—You mean by that you have been generally healthy but frail?

**A.**—Yes.

**Q.**—Your mother's treatment toward you, you say, was always very excellent?

**A.**—Very sweet and very lovely.

**Q.**—How old was Mr. Chaplin at the time he married you?

**A.**—Twenty-nine.

**Q.**—You allege in your complaint that for the first period of four months after you were married your marriage was kept a secret. At whose suggestion was that?

**A.**—Mr. Chaplin's.

**Q.**—Did he give you any reason for it?

**A.**—Only that he did not want it known on account of professional reasons, and other reasons he did not care to tell me.

**Q.**—You allege in your complaint that a short time after you were married, about four weeks, you became seized with a spell of illness, nervous prostration. Just tell the court about that.

**A.**—About four weeks, or perhaps a little less, after we were married, I was taken quite ill with fainting spells, and the doctor said I would have to go to the hospital.

**Q.**—Did you go?

**A.**—Yes.

**Q.**—Was that when the marriage became public?

**A.**—Yes.

**Q.**—Now, after the marriage became public, Mrs. Chaplin, just tell the court in your own way about the course of treatment Mr. Chaplin adopted toward you after that time?

**A.**—Well, after I was taken out of the hospital I had to stay in bed until Christmas, Christmas Eve, and the doctor sent a nurse home with me, and Mr. Chaplin got us a home up in Laughlin Park, and I had to stay in bed until Christmas Eve, and that was the first time I was down after I got out of the hospital. And Christmas afternoon—I mean the day before Christmas, Mr. Chaplin told me that he would be home and have dinner with me and help me trim the Christmas tree, and I had had mother get all the Christmas presents. I was not able to get up and I had always thought a great deal of Christmas, and that evening, I dressed and went downstairs and waited for him, and he did not come home. And I waited until 11 o'clock, and he did not come, so I trimmed the tree and mother helped me and then I went to bed and stayed awake until about two or three, and Mr. Chaplin came home about three o'clock.

**Q.**—What occurred?

**A.**—And when he came home he came upstairs and was very angry at me for buying so many Christmas presents and making such a time over Christmas.

**Q.**—Then what occurred?

**A.**—Then the next day was Christmas Day, and he would not get up all Christmas morning, and I went downstairs and took him up his presents and he was very angry at me for making so much over Christmas.

**Q.**—What would he say? What did he say?

**A.**—Well, he said it was very foolish and that he did not believe in such things and that I should not be so silly over Christmas and over having presents and liking such things.

**Q.**—Now, then, you allege that after that Christmas evening he began a course of conduct toward you of absenting himself from home. Tell the court about that.

**A.**—In February the doctor said I had to go up to Mt. Lowe for my health. I kept

**A**LMOST any young woman would be flattered to be invited to become the wife of Charlie Chaplin. Where could she hope to find more attractive prospects—such a rich, amiable, entertaining and famous husband as he was certain to be?

And such fun to have this inimitable comedian around the house! If it was well worth half a dollar or more to sit in a theatre chair for half an hour and watch photographs of his fun making, what would it be worth to have him all to herself all the time?

Think of it!

To be the bride of the merriest, funniest man in the world! All day long, from morning till night, to have Charlie Chaplin doing his stunts in her own home.

Would he hook her around the neck or her ankle with that busy cane of his, or land a squash pie in her face at dinner time, or slam the door on her fingers? Miss Harris's friends wondered about that, but the bride-to-be was sure the comedian would cut out the rough stuff at home and with his own little wife. Of course he would! So Mildred

Harris married him. It was two years ago last October. She was seventeen, he was twenty-nine.

The other day, in a Los Angeles court, Judge York listened to Mrs. Chaplin's sworn story of how the great comedian played the part of husband—and gave Mrs. Chaplin her divorce. It was expected that Charlie Chaplin would be a very original and unusual sort of a bridegroom. He was. Two months after they were married Christmas came. What sort of frolic would you imagine Charlie Chaplin would think up for his Christmas celebration with his young bride? Some novelty, some surprise of course.

And it was an entirely unexpected surprise—but the unique way the comedian celebrated that Christmas is told in Mrs. Chaplin's own words as given in the transcript of the testimony at her divorce trial printed below on this page.

Unfortunately, Charlie Chaplin himself was not present in court to explain what made him play the part as his wife described it to the judge.

getting worse and worse and I couldn't eat, so the doctor sent me up to Mt. Lowe.

**Q.**—You were in bad shape physically at that time, as I understand it?

**A.**—Yes, sir.

**Q.**—Go ahead.

**A.**—I went to Mt. Lowe and Mr. Chaplin would not go with me; he said he had to go away to think, and had to be away from me for a while. I begged him to go with me, but he would not go, so he went to Coronado.

**Q.**—With whom?

**A.**—With his secretary, and stayed down there a few days.

**Q.**—About three weeks, you say?

**A.**—He stayed a few days, and then he came back to his house. I could not stand it any longer, so I went down to the city to ask him if he would come up with me to Mt. Lowe for one day, and he said he would not come.

**Q.**—He said he would not come?

**A.**—Yes. So I took quite ill and threatened to do everything in the world if he would not come up with me one day, so he went up with me for one day and said he had to go right down; that he could just stay that day.

**Q.**—He got up there at what time in the morning?

**A.**—He went up in the evening and he went down the next morning.

**Q.**—Then how long before you saw him the next time?

**A.**—Then he went back to Coronado.

**Q.**—Well, how long did he remain there?

**A.**—He stayed a couple of weeks.

**Q.**—Were you ill all the time you were at Mt. Lowe?

**A.**—Yes.

**Q.**—Who was with you?

**A.**—Mother was with me.

**Q.**—Now, on this Christmas evening you have told about, the first Christmas evening after your marriage in October, you had invited your friends there to the house, had you?

**A.**—No, I had not; Mr. Chaplin had all his own friends; he did not want me to have mine.

**Q.**—Then, you allege, that he came home about what time on Christmas morning?

**A.**—It was about two-thirty or three.

**Q.**—Two-thirty or three. Then on Christmas morning what occurred?

**A.**—He stayed in bed all day until four o'clock; he wouldn't go down stairs with me to see the tree. I took him his presents.

**Q.**—Did he abuse you?

**A.**—He was very angry at me for making so much over Christmas.

**Q.**—What did he say?

**A.**—He said it was very foolish and wasn't right to make so much or for me to like presents and foolish things; that it was not his idea to have Christmas or celebrate Christmas; he had never done it.

**Q.**—You allege in your complaint that you had always had girl friends of approximately your own age as companions?

**A.**—Yes, sir.

**Q.**—What condition existed after you were married with reference to whether or not he would permit your friends to come and visit you?

**A.**—He did not like them; he didn't think that I should see them; he thought I should like his friends and be more studious.

**Q.**—What did he say or do with reference to your friends? He should find them in his house or the house, what was his conduct toward them?

**A.**—He was not nice to them; he wouldn't come home if I had them.

**Q.**—When you had your friends he would refuse to come to the house if he found it out?

**A.**—Yes, sir.

**Q.**—How often did that occur, Mrs. Chaplin?

**A.**—All the time; he would never tell me when he would be home; he said he had to be free to live his own life and do as he pleased.

**Q.**—Now, on that Christmas did he give you any present or token of any kind?

**A.**—No.

**Q.**—Was he earning money in considerable amount at that time?

**A.**—Yes, sir.

**Q.**—He made you no present whatever?

**A.**—No, sir.

**Q.**—What was your condition at that time of your trip to Mt. Lowe?

**A.**—I was expecting to be a mother.

**Q.**—And he knew that?

**A.**—Yes, sir.

**Q.**—At that time did you have a contract with the Universal Film Company for your services?

**A.**—I did.

**Q.**—Tell the court about that with reference to his insisting on your working when you were unable to work?

**A.**—Well, when we were married Mr. Chaplin told me he wanted me to break the contract with the Universal, because he did not want me working with them. So, when I was in the hospital, after I was first taken ill, I sent a written notice that I would not be with them any more and I was under age. My lawyer told me we could break the contract. Then, in February, when I came back from Mt. Lowe, they had been sending me my check each week, and I had been sending them back and they would return them again, but I had not cashed any. In February a friend of mine, Miss Sweet, asked me to go to New York with her when I came back from Mt. Lowe, and Mr. Chaplin had been away so long, and when he came back he said it would do me good to go to New York, so I went with her. But he wouldn't give me but \$150, and when I got East I bought a lot of baby clothes and some baby furniture and a few other things, and I did not have enough money and I wired for more money. But he would not send me any more, so I wired mother to please cash one of my checks.

**Q.**—That was the check that would reaffirm your contract with the Universal people, which he advised you to break?

**A.**—Yes, sir.

**Q.**—Did you advise him with reference to your circumstances?

**A.**—Yes.

**Q.**—Did you advise him that you expected to purchase some furniture for the expected child?

**A.**—Yes, sir.

**Q.**—And he declined to send you any money at all?

**A.**—Yes.

**Q.**—And he was making approximately \$6,000 or \$7,000 a month at that time?

**A.**—More than that.

**Q.**—You mentioned the furniture. You say there was an arrangement made about some furniture for the baby's room?

**A.**—Before I went East Mr. Chaplin said I could get a set of furniture for my room up in our home, because it was very dark.

**Q.**—That was the room in which you were to be confined?

**A.**—Yes, sir; my own room. So I bought it at Berker Brothers, and when I got back from New York the room was all furnished in the new furniture, and he took me up to see it, and I was very happy about it and he seemed to be quite pleased, but when the bill came he refused to pay it. He said it was too expensive and that I should send it back.

**Q.**—Did you send it back?

**A.**—No, sir.

**Q.**—What did you do?

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